NC DEPARTMENT OF
**HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES**

Protecting Each Other from COVID-19
(December 21, 2021)

COVID-19 cases are currently rising in North Carolina due to the Delta variant. The highly contagious variant, Omicron, is beginning to spread rapidly and is expected to cause the highest rates of COVID-19 infections of the pandemic in the coming weeks. The Omicron variant is two to three times as contagious the Delta variant, making it four to six times as contagious as the original COVID19 virus. With the holidays approaching and people gathering, it is critical and urgent to act now to protect yourselves and your family and friends. Vaccinating and boosting against COVID-19 remain the most effective ways for people to protect themselves from serious illness, hospitalization and death. Early evidence shows that boosters provide a significant level of protection against Omicron

This Winter and Holiday Season

- **Vaccinate and Boost**: Get vaccinated now, including a COVID-19 booster, as soon as you are eligible. This is particularly critical for those over age 65, those with underlying medical conditions and healthcare workers. The Modern and Pfizer COVID-19 vaccines are the best choice for most people. Layer protection by getting a flu shot.

- **Test:** Get a COVID-19 test before joining indoor gatherings with others who are not in your household and before and after traveling, regardless of your vaccine status. Get tested if you have any symptoms of COVID-19 or have been exposed to someone with COVD-19.

- **Mask:** Wear a mask indoors in public, even if you are vaccinated. For more information, see NCDHHS Winter Holiday Guidance.

If you are not fully vaccinated, you should:

- **Get vaccinated.** Getting vaccinated prevents severe illness, hospitalization and death from COVID-19 and its variants, and reduces community spread of the virus. People who are unvaccinated pose a risk to those at high risk of severe illness from COVID-19 and those who are not eligible for the vaccine, including children under 5. The highest spread of cases is happening in places with low vaccination rates. You can get your flu shot at the same time as your COVID-19 vaccine.

- **Practice the 3 Ws.** Wear a face covering in all indoor and, crowded outdoor public settings. Wait 6 feet apart in all public settings. Wash your hands often.

- **Not gather with unvaccinated individuals who do not live with you.** If you do gather, wear a mask, stay outside, and keep 6 feet of distance.

- **Not travel.** If you do travel, get tested 1-2 days before and 3-5 days after travel AND stay home and self-quarantine for a full 7 days after travel, even if you test negative.

- **Get tested** if you have any symptoms of COVID-19 or if you are gathering with individuals who are not in your household.

    o   For information on self-testing, see CDC's Self Testing guidance.

- **Quarantine and get tested** if you've been exposed to a person diagnosed with COVID-19, even if you don't have symptoms.

- **Participate in routine screening testing,** when offered.

- **Seek treatment** if you get sick. More information on treatment is available at https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/treatment

If you are fully vaccinated, you should:

- Get a COVID-19 booster when eligible and a flu shot. You can get them at the same time.

- Wear a mask in all indoor public spaces if you live in area of high or substantial levels of transmission as defined by the CDC until more people are vaccinated and viral transmission decreases. Consider wearing a face covering in crowded outdoor settings where you cannot maintain 6 feet physical distancing.

- Wear a face covering in all K-12 schools, child care, indoor settings with a large number of children or child-focused activities (e.g., children's museums), public transportation, health care settings, high density congregate settings (e.g., correction and detention facilities, homeless shelters, migrant farm camps), and large crowded indoor venues (e.g., arenas, stadiums).

- Get tested if you have any symptoms of COVID-19 or if you are gathering with others who are not in your household.

    o   After an exposure to a person with COVID-19, you should get tested 3-5 days after exposure and wear a mask around others for 14 days after exposure or until you get a negative test result.

    o   For information on self-testing, see CDC's Self Testing guidance.

- Seek treatment if you get sick. More information on treatment is available at https://covid19.ncdhhs.gov/treatment.

Employers should:

- Require employees to report vaccination status.

    o   Under state and federal law, employers may legally require employees to be vaccinated or require employees to disclose their COVID-19 vaccination status.

- Require employees who are not fully vaccinated to participate in screening testing programs, especially in high risk setting such as congregate living settings.
- If collecting vaccination status from employees is not possible, require all employees to participate in screening testing programs.
- Require fully vaccinated employees wear a face covering indoors when within 6 feet of other people if they are in an area of high or substantial levels of transmission as defined by the CDC.

- Post signage saying all employees and visitors should wear a face covering in areas of high and substantial transmission.

- Remind all employees, visitors and patrons to self-monitor and get tested if they have symptoms of COVID-19.